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Catskill aqueduct
celebration, October 12th...

[New York?]

[1917?]

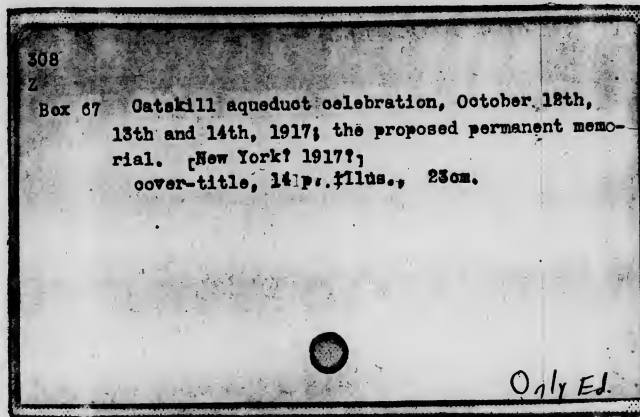
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Catskill Aqueduct Celebration

October 12th 13th and 14th
1917

The Proposed Permanent
Memorial

The Mayor's Catskill Aqueduct Celebration Committee

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Treasurer

Mr Isaac N Seligman

Secretary

Dr Edward Hagaman Hall

Executive Committee

Mr Arthur Williams, *Chairman*

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| Mr J W Lieb | Mr Charles H Strong |

Mr Henry R Towne

Sub-Committees of the Executive Committee

Committee

Chairmen

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| <i>Central Park Pageants</i> | Mr William J Lee |
| <i>City Hall Exercises</i> | Mr Wm Fellowes Morgan |
| <i>Illuminations</i> | Mr Nicholas F Brady |
| <i>Music Festival</i> | Dr Oswald G Villard |
| <i>Official Dinner</i> | Hon Elbert H Gary |
| <i>Official Medal</i> | Hon Robert W deForest |
| <i>Public School Exercises</i> | Mr Leo Arnstein |
| <i>Religious Exercises</i> | Rev Walter Laidlaw |

March 1920 - C.R.W.

The Proposed Permanent Memorial of The Catskill Aqueduct

IN December, 1916, acting upon the suggestion of representatives of some of the leading commercial bodies of the City, Mayor Mitchel appointed a committee of citizens to arrange for the celebration in 1917 of the completion of the Catskill Aqueduct.

The completion of this great engineering feat is deemed worthy of commemoration for several reasons.

In the first place, when it is remembered that only three or four years ago, in a season of drought, the City counted by days how long its reserve supply of water would last, it is a cause of inexpressible relief to the municipal authorities, and should also be to the citizens at large, that this increased supply, upon which the very life of the people depends, is now at their doors, and that the necessity of "rationing" water has been averted. This is the first reason for popular congratulation; and it has been brought about so quietly that unless there is some public demonstration, comparatively few people will realize what a great blessing has come to them and the important lessons involved.

It is an occasion, also, for unreserved pride in American genius which has achieved a stupendous engineering triumph. Starting at an elevation of 610 feet above tide level in the Catskill Mountains, and creating four large lakes on its

way, the Aqueduct skirts many steep hillsides, passes under broad, deep valleys, burrows through mountains, dives under rivers to a depth of 1114 feet below sea-level, bores through the solid rock of Manhattan Island, and delivers pure mountain water to every borough of the City. It is 120 miles long and is capable of delivering 500,000,000 gallons of water a day. The greatest of the famous Roman aqueducts was only half as long as this one, and in technical difficulty was, in comparison, like building houses with children's "blocks." The Catskill Aqueduct is three times as long as the Panama Canal,* and involved problems and difficulties unheard of in the canal's construction. Ex-Mayor McClellan, in an article published March 7, 1917, said: "The great Catskill waterway . . . is in itself certainly the greatest piece of water-supply engineering, if not the greatest engineering achievement of any kind, in the world. I think that Gen. Goethals will agree with me that the Panama Canal, while more spectacular in character, did not offer the engineering problems which had to be met and overcome in bringing an underground river all the way from the Catskills to . . . New York City."

Back of these physical achievements there were important moral and civic forces at work which the Mayor's Committee deems it highly profitable, from the standpoint of the public welfare, to emphasize in the celebration. The construction of the Catskill Aqueduct, covering a period of ten years, affords a model of honest, clean and efficient municipal government in which every citizen should take pride. It is being finished within the original estimate of expense and is a commendable example of municipal economy.† It has been

*The Panama Canal is forty-one and a half miles long from shore to shore. Extension by dredging to deep water makes the nominal length of the canal about fifty miles.

†The Aqueduct has cost to date about \$140,000,000

completed within contract time* without a labor strike, and is a tribute alike to the Commission which directed the work, the contractors who carried it out, and the workmen who labored faithfully to build it. In its inception it was fostered by citizen bodies having the public interests at heart, and in its execution it had their invaluable support. It is a testimony of what disinterested civic spirit in co-operation with faithful public officials can accomplish. The celebration, therefore, while giving an opportunity for a merited tribute to the builders of the Aqueduct, is also and chiefly an opportunity for teaching important civic lessons.

With the foregoing considerations in mind, and in view of the state of war, the Mayor's Committee has planned a modest celebration of three days beginning on October 12, 1917. The ceremonies will include some of the conventional features of such affairs, but, at the Mayor's suggestion, will differ from most of them in that it is proposed to spend very little money on performances of transient value, and to make the main objective of the celebration the creation of a Permanent Memorial which, like the Aqueduct itself, shall confer a lasting benefit on the people.

The Committee, availing itself of a singularly appropriate opportunity, is developing a plan, subject to the approval of the municipal authorities, for the utilization of the old Croton reservoir site in Central Park for this purpose. The history of this site is interesting. In 1838—fifteen years before the passage of the law establishing Central Park, when that region was a rocky wilderness, used as a general garbage dump, occupied by shanties and bone-boiling establishments, and inhabited by squatters, pigs, hordes of mongrel dogs, chickens, and other animals more or less wild,—the City acquired for a receiving reservoir of the Croton Aqueduct then

*Mayor McClellan broke ground for the Aqueduct on June 20, 1907

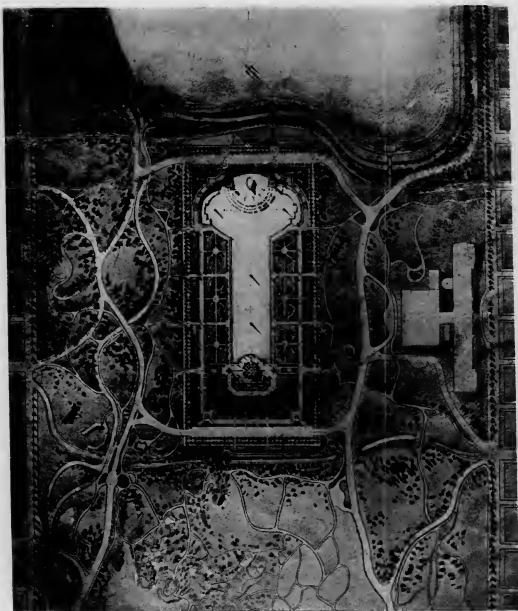
building 37.05 acres of land, bounded by the lines of 79th street, 86th street, Sixth avenue and Seventh avenue as those thoroughfares were laid out on the map by the Street Commissioners of 1807. This is an area 800 feet wide and over 1800 feet long. Of these 37 acres, 27½ were Common Lands of the City. The other 9½ acres consisted of two blocks of 4¾ acres each owned by Hickson W. Field and William Mathews respectively. The City paid \$11,000 for each of these two blocks, or \$22,000 for the 9½ acres.* On this site a great reservoir, known at that time as "the upper reservoir at Yorkville," was constructed. Into it, water was admitted with due ceremony on June 27, 1842, and the reservoir has been in continuous use ever since. This area does not belong to Central Park, but is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity.

With the completion of the Catskill Aqueduct, the need for this reservoir ends, and it is soon to be abandoned, although the larger and more modern reservoir north of the 86th street transverse road will continue in use. It seemed to the Mayor's Committee that it would be particularly appropriate, if it could be arranged, to empty this old reservoir of the outgrown Croton system at the time of the celebration in October, transfer it to the Park Department, and dedicate the site for use in some beneficial form as the Permanent Memorial of the Catskill Aqueduct. It appears from informal interviews with the public officials concerned that this is practicable provided the details are worked out in a manner acceptable to them, and the Committee is developing a plan which in due time will be formally submitted to the proper authorities for approval.

*The increase in real estate values is indicated by the fact that while these nine and a half acres cost about \$2316 an acre, the land of Central Park—not including improvements—is now valued at about \$270 000 an acre on the average. The reservoir site is therefore worth about \$10,000,000

Since it first became known that the reservoir site was to be abandoned, no less than thirty-eight different plans for its utilization have been submitted to the Park Department, but none has been approved. The Mayor's Committee has kept in mind the prevailing public sentiment—which has also been expressed to it by Mayor Mitchel, Park Commissioner Cabot Ward, and Commissioner William Williams of the Department of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity—against any radical change in the use of Central Park, and has developed a plan which, it believes, embodies the most acceptable features of the schemes previously advanced together with important new ideas, the whole project being entirely in harmony with the original conception of Central Park but greatly increasing its usefulness. Recognizing the fact that the old reservoir was built before Central Park existed, and that this region of the park, with its system of roads, paths, lawns and plantations, has grown up and been moulded around the reservoir, an important feature of the plan is that it is confined to the area of the present reservoir and does not encroach upon or disturb the arrangement of its environment.

Within the reservoir site the Mayor's Committee has aimed to attain four principal objects: First, to meet in a form harmonious with the surroundings the popular desire for larger accommodations in Central Park for recreation, including outdoor music; second, so to treat the site with a noble fountain and water area as to suggest the evolution of the City's water supply system and preserve the historical continuity of the site; third, to improve the opportunity to bestow upon the City a great art-gift, rivaling the most famous of its kind abroad; and fourth, to supply a much needed connection between the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



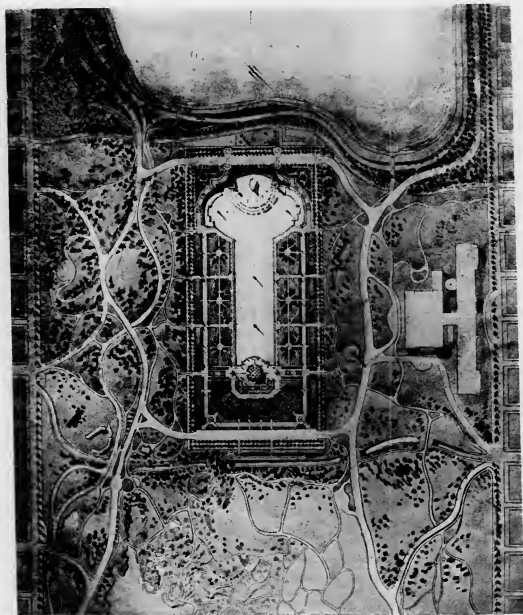
Plan Showing Proposed Development of Lower Reservoir
in Central Park as Permanent Catskill Aqueduct Memorial

The plan contemplates taking off several feet from the height of the present walls where they are above the level of the adjacent ground and constructing upon the lowered embankment a promenade 20 or 25 feet wide shaded by trees. The material removed from the walls will be used for the work inside the enclosure.

The bottom of the reservoir will be filled up with earth to the depth of several feet, leaving in the central and northern portion a body of water about 1000 feet long and 200 feet wide, expanding at the northern end into a semi-circular basin about 400 feet wide. As the present reservoir is divided into two parts by a transverse embankment on the line of 82d street, and as the bottom of the southern part is about 9 feet lower than the bottom of the northern part, the architect will avail himself of this physical characteristic for a very interesting cascade treatment between the two levels, somewhat after the fashion of a famous fountain near Madrid, and other examples abroad. The lagoon, as it may be called, can be used in summer for boating and wading; and in winter, protected from the wind, it will afford the finest skating area in the City. It can also be used for very beautiful water pageants on festive occasions.*

In the northern expansion of the lagoon it is proposed to erect in bronze the famous fountain by Frederick MacMonnies which was executed in staff at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. It represents Columbia, seated in a barge of state, with Fame at the prow blowing a trumpet, and Father Time at the helm steering. The barge is propelled by eight oars-women, representing the Arts and Sciences—ideas particularly appropriate to the location of the memorial between the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the American Museum of Natural History—and is attended by mermen and mermaids riding on sea-horses. There is no question as to the high rank of this production in

*There is nothing in the plan of the Mayor's Committee to prevent the use of the lagoon as a swimming pool if the City shall deem it wise and appropriate to authorize bathing in Central Park in years to come. The Committee has no power to determine that question, and leaves details of use and administration to be settled by public sentiment and the municipal authorities in the future. Within a year, people wishing salt-water baths can reach the sea-beaches for a five-cent fare.



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MacMonnies Columbian Fountain

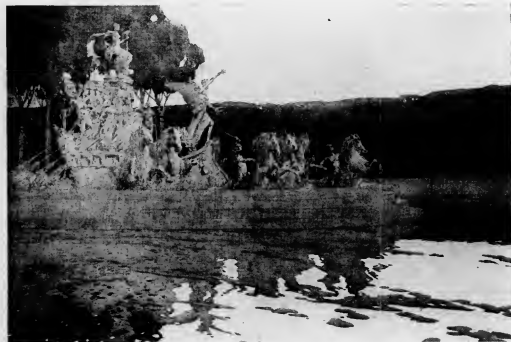
the art world. It excited the universal admiration of artists and the public in 1893 and was unhesitatingly accorded the first place in the great exposition. It is referred to in international encyclopedias as the most famous sculptural work of that occasion, and is mentioned by writers, such as Lorado Taft in his "History of American Sculpture," with high commendation. This fountain will be the artistic gem of the Catskill Aqueduct Memorial. Nine-tenths of the reservoir site will be devoted to practical uses, developed in rugged and substantial fashion, made attractive by shade trees but free from useless embellishment, where people can get in actual touch with the thing they are enjoying; the fountain will be the only thing in the scheme designed to appeal solely to the aesthetic sense without utilitarian purpose, but, while occupying little space, will be the crowning art work of its class in the United States.

At the southern end of the lagoon will be a music pavilion capable of holding a large orchestra and chorus. Immediately

surrounding it will be additional accommodations for a thousand singers.

Between the music pavilion and the southern wall of the reservoir will be built a series of terraces rising in succession to the top of the wall. These terraces, rising in stages of about four feet each, will be faced with the rough stone from the reservoir walls, filled with earth, planted with trees and shrubs, and will afford accommodations, it is thought, for about 25,000 persons who may wish to sit or stand and enjoy whatever performance may be given below. The rugged terraced walls will be void of architectural niceties, but will be covered with vines and present a pleasing appearance. This terrace amphitheatre and the immediate environment of the music pavilion are calculated to fill a long-felt want for better facilities than now exist for popular enjoyment of outdoor music. The band-stand and surroundings on the Mall are confessedly inadequate for this purpose. The terrace amphitheatre may, of course, also be used for many other purposes appropriate to the park.

On each side of the lagoon, about 200,000 square feet of space—400,000 square feet in all—will be devoted to playgrounds. These playgrounds are a cardinal feature of the plan. They will be entirely unlike the lawn playgrounds of Central Park and will enormously increase the recreation resources of the park. In order to admit of the largest measure of practical usefulness, it is not proposed to convert this area into grass covered lawns, but to make the playgrounds, like those in the Luxembourg Garden in Paris, of dirt covered with gravel, so that they cannot "wear out." They will be shaded by trees. The Luxembourg, which contains about 55 acres, has few lawns and not many flowers, but is characterized by squares enclosed by trees and open spaces for children's games, terraces for promenades, fountains, etc., and



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has music every summer evening. It is the most frequented promenade on the left bank of the Seine and one of the most democratic institutions in all Paris. The playground area on the east and west sides of the Central Park lagoon will be nearly four times the area of the field of the City College Stadium and five times the area of Jasper Oval. It will accommodate 25,000 children in informal recreation and twice that number of persons in close formation. On an equal area of the Sheep Meadow playground in Central Park about 400,000 children played in the season of 1915; but if the lagoon playgrounds are not covered with grass, they can be used more intensively and continuously than the Sheep Meadow and, acre for acre, will have many times greater usefulness for recreation purposes.*

The idea of the terrace and playground treatment of the main area referred to is to provide practicable and usable accommodations for large numbers of people, both on promenades and playgrounds, avoiding such delicate ornamentation as may impose undue restraint and yet preserving a park-like appearance in harmony with the situation. It is not to be a formal picture garden, to be looked at and not touched; but a great playground, where children can play, run and jump to their hearts' content, without getting "lost" in intricate winding paths, and where their elders can enjoy themselves appropriately in other ways. The artistic focus of the scheme will be the wonderful MacMonnies fountain at the northern end of the lagoon.

Paralleling these playgrounds on either side, and between them and the tops of the east and west walls, will be one or two terraces affording additional space for play, promenad-

*Park Commissioner Ward estimates, on the basis of the average of eighteen different days at different seasons of the year, that 49,000,000 persons used Central Park in 1916

ing, resting, or observation of what is taking place on the lower levels.

It is estimated that nearly 100,000 persons altogether could be accommodated if all the available land space in the proposed plan were occupied.

Upon the top of the embankment at both the north and south ends will be a broad driveway or esplanade, connecting, by means of driveways of ordinary width, with the adjacent drives on the east and west, thus making convenient avenues of communication between the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. This provision for connections between the museums, it is believed, will have an important effect on the scientific and art life of the city. At present, many persons living on the east side of the city are deterred from visiting the American Museum of Natural History, and many on the west side from visiting the Metropolitan Museum of Art, by the lack of connecting drives. Many visitors from out of town, who wish to visit both museums on the same day, are similarly inconvenienced. The plan therefore contemplates meeting the needs of the museums for easier intercommunication.

In the vista looking northward, rising above the leafy background of the MacMonnies fountain, will appear the majestic white plume of a jet-fountain which it is proposed to construct in the upper reservoir. This jet-fountain is already assured by the tender of a private gift to William Williams, Commissioner of Water Supply, Gas and Electricity. It will be a single jet of Catskill water rising from the surface of the upper reservoir to a height of about 90 feet and will be located in the axis of the lower reservoir, so as to form a part of a single composition. As this water will fall back into the reservoir without waste, it can be kept in perpetual operation and gives promise of being the "Old



Proposed Treatment of MacMonnies Fountain, Showing Jet Fountain at the rear

Faithful," not of the Yellowstone, but of Central Park. The turning on of the Catskill water at "Old Faithful" will form a feature of the celebration in conjunction with the drawing down of the lower reservoir and the dedication of the site.

The effect of the proposed treatment of the lower reservoir will be that, viewed from the outside, there will be no change in its present aspect except that in places its walls will be lowered several feet and instead of the present rigid top-line of masonry will appear a varying crestline of trees and shrubs. The interior view, however, will be a complete transformation from a plain, rectangular water-surface to an area diversified by terraces, trees, shrubs, promenades, etc., with a beautiful fountain at one end of a lagoon and a pavilion for musical and other exercises at the other.

From the point of view of economics, the plan is the cheapest in proportion to the results obtained that could be devised. To dig such a place today would cost millions; and to fill it up and endeavor to mould it topographically into the rest of the park would cost as much. From the engineering standpoint, the "cuts" and the "fills" can be so calculated that it will not be necessary to go outside for material; and

the character of the development proposed is such as to require a minimum cost for upkeep. There will also be no waste of water. The water of the jet fountain in the upper reservoir, as before stated, will fall back into that reservoir and be saved, the operation serving somewhat to aerate and improve the water. The water for the MacMonnies fountain and lagoon will be surplusage, of which, the committee is informed, about 1,000,000 gallons a day will be available without expense for at least fifteen years. Furthermore, the water from the lagoon can be led to the lower lakes in the park, thus freshening their water and affecting additional economy.

The preliminary plans have been prepared by the committee's request by Mr. Thomas Hastings, the architect, of the firm of Carrere & Hastings, who, by an interesting coincidence, designed the New York Public Library which occupies the site of another abandoned Croton reservoir. Mr. Hastings, who is a member of the Federal Art Commission which has charge of the park development of the City of Washington and who for twenty years has been in touch with the park system of New York in various ways, is entirely in favor of preserving the original conception of Central Park. He is a member of the Mayor's Committee and has been serving in this matter out of public spirit. Recognized throughout the United States as a leading authority on such subjects, his comment on the Central Park plan has particular value. He says that the present opportunity is a wonderful one for New York City and for the art world of America, starting, as it does, with a marvelous site which otherwise would cost millions of dollars. It is an opportunity, he says, which should not be lost or be squandered on any project unworthy of the site and the occasion.



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